

Abstract

The United States is one of the wealthiest nations in the world, but food insecurity and hunger within the country remain concerning. Child hunger can result in stifling a young person's ability to learn as well as lead them to being impoverished as an adult. Many children are coming to school too distracted by their empty stomachs to focus on doing well in school—academically, socially, and emotionally. Local backpack food programs provide needed food to children who would otherwise not have adequate access to food during the weekends. There are many feeding programs that cater to elementary school students; however, models focusing on middle school demographics are scarce. This study measured the acceptance and feasibility of implementation of a weekend feeding program for nutritionally vulnerable Banks County Middle School students, using a cohort design study and qualitative data analysis. The study utilized fifteen semi-structured, qualitative interviews to explore implementation. Staff members determined that societal influences and aspects of family life might contribute to food insecurity. Identification strategies included individual staff efforts and relational interactions between staff, students, and families. Three overarching themes that emerged from this research included: staff members' philosophy, perspectives, and beliefs about food insecurity, the school as a contextual resource for identifying food insecurity, and the goal of de-stigmatizing those in the program. These findings suggest that successfully implementing the program requires recognition of the multi-level influences on child food insecurity. Recommendations were made to implement and sustain a weekend feeding program for BCMS students.